

Condition of the Guard Address

Eighty-Eighth General Assembly

The Iowa National Guard

Adding Value to our State and Nation since 1839

By MG Timothy E. Orr

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Good Morning and thank you for your warm welcome.

Governor Reynolds, Lieutenant Governor Gregg, Mr. President, Madam Speaker, legislative leaders, senators, representatives, distinguished guest, family, friends, my fellow Iowans, I am honored to be here this morning to provide an update on the Condition of the Iowa National Guard.

As I begin this morning I want to once again thank Governor Reynolds and Lieutenant Governor Gregg for their strong and enduring support of our Soldiers, Airmen, their families and civilian employers.

Your untiring efforts on behalf of our military is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for attending our send-off and welcome home ceremonies, and thanks for being a part of last week's patching ceremony, where we initiated more than 120 new Soldiers into the Iowa Army National Guard as they begin their journey of service to our State and Nation.

Likewise, I want to thank you, our citizen-legislators, for all you do to support the Iowa National Guard and all Iowans who serve in uniform.

And finally, thanks to the citizens of Iowa for their incredible support, which is absolutely vital to our continued success.

Since our founding nearly 180 years ago, the Iowa National Guard has strived to accomplish every mission assigned, respond without fail to natural and manmade disasters here at home, and deployed abroad to meet the national security needs of our country.

The profession of arms is one of service above self.

No profession asks more of its members than serving ones country in uniform.

We are entrusted with the defense of our nation, the protection of our citizens, and the preservation of our way of life.

As National Guard members we serve both as protectors of our state, and when called, in defense of our nation.

Our legendary Iowa National Guard reputation was earned through the blood, sweat, and hard work of those who came before, and is proudly carried on by those who serve today.

We are committed to preserving this legacy and passing it on to those who step forward to take up the mantle of defending our state and nation in the years to come.

We share common attributes of integrity, courage, competence, and as military professionals, we are defined by our strength of character, life-long commitment to Army and Air Force values, and a dedication to mission accomplishment.

I am so proud to serve with the men and women of the Iowa National Guard, they are true professionals in every sense of the word and who have sworn an oath to defend our state and nation with their honor, with their service, and with their very lives.

Our Soldiers and Airmen are treasures that benefit our society in ways large and small, making a difference every day in their communities and adding value to our state and nation beyond their military service.

Recruiting and retaining quality individuals is our highest priority.

In doing so we must broaden the appeal of military service to include people from across the fabric of our society.

The strength of our Republic depends on willing individuals from every corner of our state, every social economic, and demographic group, and every ethnic background, to step forward and serve alongside their fellow citizens.

As I've reported before and is well documented in the media, the burden of national defense is currently borne by less than one percent of our population.

And nearly 80 percent of those who do serve come from families with multiple generations of military service.

The pride and honor of military service should not be reserved for just those who hail from a tradition of military service.

It is an opportunity that must be available and sought throughout society in order to balance the responsibilities of national defense across all our citizens.

Given the increased emphasis on the operational role of the National Guard, recruiting high-quality men and women is a key component of my readiness mission.

With only three of ten 17 to 24 year-olds eligible for military service, there's concern among military and civilian leaders alike about the readiness of our military forces to defend this nation in the years to come.

In order to sustain a strong democracy and ensure the safety and security of our citizens both at home and abroad, we must encourage young Americans to consider military service as a viable and honorable option.

Experiences gained through military service provides a lifetime of personal and professional benefit.

It provides life and professional skills that translate to a significant lower unemployment rate of 2.7% for veterans, compared to a national average for the general population of 3.5%.

Beyond the practical benefit of gaining marketable skills to better their lives, military service gives young people a chance to serve a cause greater than themselves.

This is something that study after study tells us is critically important to Centennials, a generation of young men and women, who strive to live a life of meaning.

Because of this, our Iowa National Guard motto of “We live here, we work here, we serve here” is more fitting today than ever before.

For those seeking greater meaning in their lives, the Iowa National Guard provides a multitude of opportunities to make a difference.

Our Soldiers and Airmen serve for many reasons:

- To be an integral part of a world class team
- To seek leadership and training opportunities
- To gain hands-on experience working with state-of-the-art technology and equipment
- To graduate debt-free with a two-year, four-year or technical school degree
- To learn an occupational skill that leads to meaningful employment
- To secure their financial future with a military retirement
- To carry on a proud tradition of family service
- Or to just be part of something bigger than themselves.

To do something that 99% of the population will never experience.

No matter the reason, we are grateful for their service and the value they add to the well-being of our state.

As we look around the globe, both here at home and abroad, the challenges we face today are among the most complex and demanding that I have seen in over 40 years of military service.

In order to meet these challenges, we are committed to ensuring the Iowa National Guard remains ready and resourced to accomplish our four core priorities:

- (1) Defending our state and nation;
- (2) Protecting Iowa and the US homeland;
- (3) Building enduring partnerships at the local, state, federal and international levels; and
- (4) And making our communities better places to live.

Defending our state and nation is our number one priority.

We do this by providing ready forces to the President of the United States and the Governor of Iowa when called.

Our state's contribution in providing ready forces is significant.

Since September 11, 2001, the Iowa National Guard has mobilized and deployed more than 19,000 Iowa National Guard Soldiers and Airmen.

There is no doubt that Iowa has done and will continue to do its part to defend our state and nation.

As we sit here today, nearly 300 Iowa National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are deployed supporting overseas contingency operations in US Central and US Southern Command Areas of Operations.

In September, approximately 400 Soldiers assigned to the 248th Aviation Support Battalion from Muscatine, Davenport, Waterloo, and Boone returned home from the Middle East where they provided aviation maintenance and logistical support to a combat aviation brigade.

The 248th received the Army's 2018 Outstanding Aviation Logistics Support Unit award for superior theater-wide support of Operations Inherent Resolve and Spartan Shield, operating at 12 locations across Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Turkey.

An example of the Iowa work ethic our Soldiers and Airmen bring to the fight is that of Captain Joshua Gates from Council Bluffs.

Captain Gates, a company commander with the 248th Aviation Support Battalion, recently returned from his third overseas deployment.

He enlisted in the Iowa National Guard in 1999 and commissioned as a Second Lieutenant through the Iowa National Guard's Officer Candidate School in 2013.

His personal example of service and commitment extends beyond his military uniform.

When not serving his state and nation, Captain Gates serves his community as an Emergency Medical Technician and Firefighter with the Council Bluffs Fire Department.

One Soldier, making twice the difference in and out of his military uniform, CPT Gates please stand to be recognized.

This past year, the Iowa Air National Guard was also fully engaged supporting overseas missions and other active duty requirements.

The 185th Air Refueling Wing in Sioux City deployed more than 200 Airmen to the Middle East where they provided critical support to theater commanders and continue to provide ongoing air refueling support for real-world missions.

The 133rd Test Squadron in Fort Dodge deployed approximately 60 members to the Middle East where they conducted critical testing on Air Force Command and Control systems.

The 132nd Wing in Des Moines deployed nearly 100 Airman around the globe to provide overseas contingency support and continues on a daily basis to support overseas operations from home by performing remotely piloted aircraft missions, intelligence analysis, and cyber security tasks.

While deployed, SSgt Rik Zortman from Avoca, Iowa, spends his spare time creating awareness for cancer and has helped raise close to \$10,000 for two organizations fighting childhood cancer, in memory of his son Armstrong, who he lost to this horrible disease.

Known as the human etch-a-sketch, SSgt Zortman runs pre-determined patterns that spells out the names of children affected by cancer on a map.

Since July 2017, he has sketched close to 300 names and has run over 930 miles for this cause.

SSgt Zortman's passion for serving others is a bedrock Iowa National Guard value. SSgt Zortman cannot be with us today, he is currently serving overseas.

Here at home, our second priority is to be the primary military crisis response force for Iowa, and the United States when necessary.

To do this, we capitalize on the experience and capabilities gained from our federal deployments and military training to assist civilian authorities in responding to large scale natural and man-made disasters here in Iowa.

Thankfully, 2018 was a relatively quiet year for our emergency response operations.

We used this time to further plan, prepare, and rehearse for potential disaster response operations on a multitude of scenarios.

Part of these plans include working with other state agencies and several local communities to develop a multi-agency exercise that will occur in Woodbury County later this year.

This exercise will improve our ability to prepare for and respond to complex domestic emergencies.

Another area of increased state support is within the cyber security field.

The 168th Air National Guard's Cyber Operations Squadron, located in Des Moines, is uniquely organized to assist our state with professionally trained cyber-warriors during a potential cyber security attack on critical infrastructure.

The 168th Cyber Operations Squadron works with local, state, and independent organizations to plan and conduct cyber response table top exercises in order to determine potential cyber security vulnerabilities.

Many of those who serve in the 168th Cyber Squadron are part-time Traditional Airmen, working as either IT professionals in civilian companies, public institutions, or are students taking advantage of state educational benefits to obtain higher level cyber security credentials and degrees.

These uniquely skilled cyber warriors are a valuable asset in both their service to our state and nation, and as highly trained IT employees available to our state's companies and public institutions.

A fine example of this is Airmen First Class Josiah Reeves, a farm kid from Maxwell, where he was homeschooled and worked part-time at Hy-Vee before joining the Iowa Air National Guard in 2018.

Growing up, Airmen First Class Reeves had a passion for working with electronics and the technical training offered by the Iowa Air Guard made his enlistment an easy decision.

Airmen First Class Reeves graduated from Air Force tech school this past September and now currently serves full-time with the 132d Wing at the Des Moines Air Base.

The Iowa National Guard provided this Citizen-Airmen training and employment opportunities and next fall he plans to use his education benefits to pursue a STEM focused degree at Iowa State University. Airmen Reeves please stand to be recognized.

Another important domestic support asset we have in the state is the Iowa National Guard's Counterdrug program and Midwest Counter Drug Training Center.

This federally funded program, which has existed since 1989, plays an important role in helping reduce the supply and demand of illicit drugs in the State of Iowa.

In addition, this center provides critical training at no cost to local law enforcement personnel and drug prevention and treatment professionals.

The Iowa National Guard is an important partner in the fight against opioid abuse.

In 2018, the Counterdrug program trained 824 law enforcement officers across the state to properly administer Narcan, the antidote for opioid overdoses.

Through the assistance of Counterdrug specialists, more than one pound of fentanyl, which equates to more than 180,000 fatal doses, and nearly 15 pounds of heroin, were seized and taken off the street in Iowa.

And in 2018, more than \$63 million in drugs and \$3.5 million in cash and assets were seized from drug dealers in Iowa with the assistance of the Iowa National Guard's Counterdrug program.

Our third priority is building enduring partnerships at the local, state, federal, and international levels.

One of our most important collaborations is through our State Partnership Program with the Kosovo Security Force and the Republic of Kosovo through our whole of society partnering endeavor.

Last May, we participated in Eagle 6, an international disaster response capstone training exercise, with our Kosovo Security Force partners.

This exercise brought together over 8 international countries, 55 Iowa National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, and our Kosovo Security Force partners to test their ability to respond quickly and effectively during an international natural disaster response.

Another vital element to the success of our Kosovo partnership is our whole of society vision, which has expanded this important program of exchanges far beyond the Iowa National Guard into our local communities.

Today, a number of Sister City relationships between cities in Kosovo and Iowa have developed.

The cities of Johnston, Fort Dodge, Norwalk, and Des Moines have all created official partnerships with cities in Kosovo while Sioux City and Dubuque are working to finalize their agreements.

A critical element to the success of our Kosovo partnership is Consul General Xhavit Gashi. General Gashi has been a part of this special relationship from the beginning.

From his time as the Kosovo Security Force Attaché in Washington, D.C., to his work for the last three years as Kosovo's top diplomat in Iowa, General Gashi played a key role in making this partnership the best in the country.

I am honored that he is with us this morning and I am proud to call him a friend and partner. Ladies and Gentlemen, please join me in thanking General Gashi for his tireless work on behalf of his fellow citizens in Kosovo and his friends in Iowa.

My fourth and final priority is working to make our communities better places to live for everyone.

One of the ways we do this is through our collaboration with the Governor's STEM Advisory Council as well as working with Career and Technical Education, or CTE programs.

Unique to the Iowa National Guard, we offer a wide variety of educational and career opportunities for students interested in STEM and CTE career fields.

This past summer we hosted two high school teachers, one from Waukee and one from West Des Moines Valley, for six weeks as part of the State's STEM externship program.

These educators spent time at multiple Iowa National Guard facilities working in a variety of STEM-related career fields to gain firsthand knowledge of how to take an educational STEM standard and apply it in a real-world setting.

The combination of hands-on learning, coupled with strong educational connections, enable these teachers to now engage their students in more meaningful and substantial ways.

Understanding the science behind how a helicopter flies through the air or the mathematical calculations that enable operators to pilot an unmanned aerial vehicle from half a world away, allows students to experience STEM related concepts in action.

An example of this is Senior Airmen Jessica Thomerson, of the 233d Intelligence Squadron, Iowa Air National Guard, who recently supported disaster response planning during exercise PATRIOT NORTH 18 at Fort McCoy and Volk Field, Wisconsin.

While flying missions with the Civil Air Patrol she pioneered a means for transmitting overhead pictures via radio frequency to help first-responders immediately assess damage from natural disasters and access routes to help victims.

Airmen Thomerson, a Des Moines native and current DMACC community college student, takes her real-world experience gained through the military, and uses it to mentor kids studying STEM related topics in the classroom.

Her passion for education and action helps lead STEM engagements that inspire students in learning core concepts while having fun with hands-on projects.

Airman Thomerson provides value to her community, state and nation through her training and service with the Iowa National Guard, Airmen Thomerson please stand to be recognized.

We are able to add value back into our communities because the state has invested in the Iowa National Guard through support of important programs such as the Iowa National Guard Educational Assistance Program, or NGEAP.

NGEAP, which is administered by our friends at the Iowa College Student Aid Commission, provides our Soldiers and Airmen an opportunity to further their education at institutions of higher learning throughout the state of Iowa.

Thanks to your generous support, nearly 1,200 Iowans a year, who choose to serve their state and Nation in the Iowa National Guard, have 100% of their tuition paid at the State Regents' rate to attend Iowa colleges, universities, and community colleges.

Because of the NGEAP program, the Iowa National Guard is able to keep young people in the state while providing them with a high-quality Iowa education.

NGEAP is much more than simply a benefit to our Soldiers and Airmen, it is the beginning of a professional career path that provides opportunities through intensive training, education, leadership and practical experience.

When combined with a life-long commitment to Army and Air Force values, numerous STEM/CTE opportunities, and our committed diversity outreach programs, the Iowa National Guard offers a diverse foundation of education, service, and flexible career choices for young Iowans across the state to consider.

As you leave here today, I ask that you carry our message back to your districts and local communities, share our stories of service, opportunity, and encourage all young Iowans to consider serving in the Iowa National Guard.

As I come to a close, history reminds us that our state and nation will undoubtedly face domestic or international challenges now and in the future, but you can take comfort knowing that the Iowa National Guard is poised to respond when called.

We stand ready to Defend America, at home and abroad, just as we have done continuously since 1839.

I am so very proud of all our service men and women, our rich heritage, and our resolve, as we continue our role in the preservation of the ideals upon which our nation and state were founded.

On behalf of our Soldiers, Airmen, and their families, thank you for this opportunity to provide you with an update on the Condition of the Iowa National Guard.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.